

Vermont PBS

Local Content & Service Report, 2019

Programming and Activities to Benefit Vermonters

All of us at Vermont PBS continue to find joy and enrichment in the stories we bring to our viewing audience and our efforts to celebrate our home in Vermont and our place in the wider world. During 2019, we continued to explore our steadfast commitment to bringing Vermonters together to discover, discuss and celebrate our shared experiences. We amplified our efforts to reach and enrich our unserved and underserved audiences through a robust community engagement calendar and initiatives that were inclusive both in terms of audience representation and content. Expanded programming, partnerships and activities engaged adults and kids alike on air, online and in communities across our viewing region.

During 2019, Vermont PBS continued its commitment to reach and enrich our unserved and underserved audiences through a robust community engagement calendar and initiatives that were inclusive both in terms of audience representation and content. Our efforts in this regard are driven by Vermont PBS Education consultant, Heather Duhamel, and our new full time Senior Events Manager, Amy Zielinski, who work together to further our engagement with our viewers across the region.

CONNECTING WITH KIDS & FAMILIES

One of Vermont PBS most ambitious and important undertakings has been to partner with the Champlain Valley Head Start Program to help parents from economically disadvantaged circumstances learn and practice ways to engage with their preschool age children in school readiness activities at home. In addition to having the highest population density of economically disadvantaged families and individuals in Vermont, Chittenden County is home to a growing number of recent refugees and immigrants. Approximately 90% of families included will be at or below the federal poverty level and the remaining 10% will be low income. Approximately 25% of participants will be New American refugee families with English as a second or third language in the home. Families from Champlain Valley Head Start Preschools and ECHO Early Learning Playgroup are part of the 9% of Chittenden County residents and 25% of our participants who speak a language other than English at home. The Burlington area has been a designated Refugee Resettlement Area since 1989.

In the past fiscal year, the Vermont PBS Parents + Preschool Program held three parent workshops for 27 families whose preschool-age children participate in the Head Start Program. Participating families had incomes at or below the federal poverty level, which is one of the eligibility criteria for participation in Head Start. In collaboration with Head Start, the Vermont PBS Parents + Preschool Program identified and met the following project goals:

- (1) successfully implemented a pilot school readiness enrichment program with a focus on literacy, math and now science for preschoolers from economically disadvantaged families served by Head Start;
- (2) developed a custom curriculum that linked research-driven teaching strategies with engaging, readily available children's learning resources (e.g., popular story books, PBS Read to Learn handouts with easy activities to implement at home, an electronic kid-friendly tablet pre-loaded with educational activities and games, and information and guidance on how PBS Kids programs can supplement all of the resources for increased learning);

(3) held Teacher workshops and participated in two inservice and one community event to support navigation of Ready to Learn and digital literacy concepts
(4) followed up with participant Head Start families and teachers through direct outreach, meetings, phone calls, and surveys to gain evaluative feedback; and
(5) begun planning for the next phase of the project that can reach more families in partnership with Champlain Valley Head Start and including our science center, ECHO Leahy Center for Lake Champlain, with a shared focus on early hands on science and technology.

We continued working with some of the same families and extended our reach to classroom teachers offering 5 unique digital literacy classroom backpacks filled with Ready to Learn activities, books for home and a PBS Playtime Safe Tablet. These backpacks reached 45 preschool children and families granting easy access to digital literacy activities, safe technology and 225 new books for home. The families were from three different Vermont Counties – Chittenden, Franklin, and Addison – representing the Champlain Valley Head Start’s large geographic service area and the diverse, community-specific demographic characteristics of each region.

A new educational resource landing page (vermontpbs.org/kids/learn/) has been launched to showcase all the resources that Vermont PBS brings educators including parents and teachers. The page also promotes our content that is now live on our upgraded section of *PBS Learning Media* and enhances initiatives geared to engage with our youngest viewers.

Vermont PBS had a presence at the New England Head Start Association Conference reaching 300 teachers around New England and at the EPSCoR Symposium which reaches 70 teachers at the High School level. We have been included in Listservs which include Let’s Grow Kids Shared Service email (reaching 1,700 Early Educators) and the Agency of Education Science Listserv (reaching 4,000 Teachers).

As part of the RTL Community Collaborative for Early Learning and Media Project Proposal, we completed the RTL Community Collaborative Needs Assessment Resource Tool with the CVOEO Head Start project leadership. This living document continues to guide our work together. Inspired by PBSTeacherline and PBS Parents, Vermont PBS localized a national Teacher Appreciation Week tribute, gifting 65 teachers with backpacks containing teacher resources on Provider Appreciation day.

The team has endeavored to develop 21 family events, reaching 4,000 Vermont families in 8 Vermont counties. Our Education Consultant, Heather Duhamel MEd, guides groups of families through interactive activities and discussions about ways to use digital with young children. Vermont PBS (VTPBS) has partnered with Champlain Valley Head Start (CVOEO) to implement digital education workshops for Head Start parents, grandparents, and caretakers. Participating families receive training to engage their children in home-based “playful learning” designed to increase school-readiness skills and access to safe interactive technology. In our project, families receive a “PBS Playtime Player” Pad (digital literacy tools) and new children’s books (typical literacy tools) to use with their children. The tablets are delivered preloaded with trusted PBS Kids content that does not require WiFi so that families who cannot afford internet access are not limited in their use. For some families, this is their first and only in-home device that is safe for their children in rural and urban areas.

COMMUNITY COLLABORATIONS

-Mister Chris & Friends (MCAF)

A second season of *Mister Chris and Friends*, a Vermont PBS children's show, continues to be a resource for gentle media for neurodiverse children and families. The show integrates early math, literacy and science concepts in a sensory sensitive way using song to guide adventure. Vermont PBS created unique Learning Activities to go along with each episode in Season Two. These Standards-based early education activities focus on whole child access and invite families to play along. These activities and episodes have been printed and shared with partners, teachers and families locally at ECHO Leahy Center for Lake Champlain, Evolution Yoga and Champlain Valley Head Start. They can be found on www.vermontpbs.org/kids/learn and are included on the national PBS LearningMedia, offering teacher access to trusted content to supplement their curriculum for any grade level.

- Vermont PBS launched a series of Mister Chris And Friends In Concert events, taking the band and experience to kids around the state in a series of community performances designed to educate while entertaining. Vermont PBS has teamed up with [Let's Grow Kids](#) and [ECHO, Leahy Center for Lake Champlain](#) to bring Mister Chris and Friends in Concert to venues around Vermont, with a focus on the region's underserved rural communities. Four concerts are scheduled, complete with sensory-friendly science, technology, engineering and mathematic (STEM)-based learning activities provided by ECHO at each event. Big blue blocks, the wind wall, gravity chairs and energy bike for big kid and parent energy were set along with big cozy bean bag chairs and coloring centers defining a "chill out" space for all. Designed to be a sensory sensitive experience - lights and volume were adjusted to meet the needs of a sensory sensitive audience. This was supported by Chris and his band politely reminding adults in the room to make sure to keep their volume at a comfortable level for little ears. Our Vermont PBS "appy hour" and PBS Playtime Player raffle were lead generation successes and we are working to convert these leads and the MCAF Eventbrite email list to reach and invite these super fans to the Big, Big, Concert events for Season 2 in June. This is a great example of how Kids' Club is cultivating relationships making Vermont PBS and all that we do unforgettable.

Family Community Events

-Our partners at Shelburne Museum celebrated Family Day and invited Vermont PBS to join the fun. Over 1300 guests visited the museum, many looking to visit with PBS Kids favorite character, Clifford, The Big Red Dog. Vermont PBS engaged families with a host of lawn games and a fun raffle for a PBS Kids Play Time Learning Pad.

-Daniel Tiger, the PBS Kids favorite and rock star of the toddler set, came to the Flynn Theater in Burlington for a live stage performance for over 1300 attendees and Vermont PBS was on hand with a fully branded lobby experience distributing Kids Club premiums and generating email leads via a raffle opportunity.

Sunday Best – Vermont PBS, in partnership with VTIFF, launched its first *Sunday Best* film screening event at Main Street Landing on the Burlington waterfront. Screenings follow each second Sunday of each month and include content from PBS partners such as Indie Lens and POV.

Poetry Out Loud – Vermont PBS once again collaborated with The Vermont Humanities Council to bring "Poetry Out Loud", Vermont's premiere student poetry competition, to schools and public audiences

across Vermont. Each year, Vermont Humanities Council organizes a regional competition from which ten finalists compete to be the state champion. 2019 marked the event's 13th year, and Vermont PBS provided promotion, production assistance and presented a live stream of the Vermont state finals of *Poetry Out Loud*, a national competition for highschoolers created by the National Endowment for the Arts and the Poetry Foundation. The national recitation contest teaches high school students the art of memorizing and reciting great works of poetry. Poetry Out Loud has engaged more than 3 million students and 50,000 teachers from 10,000 schools in every state, Washington, DC, the US Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico. It was created by the National Endowment for the Arts and the Poetry Foundation and administered by state arts agencies.

Downton Abbey Premiere— We enjoyed a wonderful community engagement event with an exclusive screening event for more than 300 attendees, many of them fabulously dressed in period costumes.

BritClub Teas – Vermont lovers of British programming share their passion each spring at our annual Britclub Tea & Screening events. It's a great opportunity for like-minded folks to feel a sense of community around something they love – and to give us their input regarding upcoming programming choices on their public television station. These popular and well-attended events around our viewing region provide a great opportunity to engage with some of our most loyal supporters.

Connecting with Community/News & Public Affairs

Collaboration with VPR: For the second consecutive year, Vermont PBS partnered with Vermont Public Radio to co-create THIS LAND: The Changing Story of Rural Vermont. The project explores the realities and rewards of living in rural Vermont through a statewide poll, news and analysis, a storytelling event and other special programming. Vermont PBS is proud to team up with VPR to combine our professional expertise to give voice to the daily experience of rural Vermonters. Throughout the fall we used the full power of our combined public media to explore the story of contemporary rural life and to spark conversation. Together we seek to explain the issues faced by rural communities and highlight grassroots solutions that show promise for the future.

Elements of the project were made available at thislandvt.org, and included a Rural Life Survey – a statewide poll in which Vermonters rate their quality of life, sense of community, use of health care and the relationship between schools and property taxes. Their responses are compared with national data from other rural Americans. The scientific poll was conducted by Braun Research Inc. under the direction of Rich Clark, professor of political science at Castleton University and the former director of the Castleton Polling Institute. The survey was brought to life at our Rural Stories On Stage event from the geographic center of Vermont, where we heard personal stories from Vermonters who have traveled the walks of rural life, with all its challenges and joys. A Docu-series: The Future Of Farming on Vermont PBS featured *The Future Of Farming* visits with two farm families to hear firsthand the serious challenges and innovative opportunities for this signature Vermont industry.

DIGITAL ENGAGEMENT

Social – Our efforts to engage with Vermont PBS viewers on social media increased 170% on average over the previous year. Vermont-centric content shared by our Vermont partner organizations resulted in the strongest social impressions by far. Using the Facebook “invite” feature with all organic posts, as well as all boosted (paid) posts, led to significantly greater gains in new page likes.

Vermont PBS App –With over 3,200 new app users to date, our daily active users continue to grow and we are optimizing and incorporating various promotional tools, including notifications which we have used for various priority programming and events.

e-Newsletters – Our newest e-newsletter, *The Lift*, debuted at the start of Q2, with strong initial engagement results that continued to grow through the end of the quarter. We are currently applying some of the processes and metrics developed for it to help us optimize our other e-newsletters. *This Week*, our weekly e-newsletter featuring program and event highlights, and the *Kids News*, a similar monthly highlight for kids and parents, both received major redesigns when we shifted editing platforms early in Q2. They will each undergo one more redesign to the new branding soon, but these new iterations are much easier to create and are optimized to look great on desktops or mobile devices and feature partners.

Some Important Facts

- Vermont PBS Kids programming is available to nearly all Vermont preschool children for free, over the air and online – no cable access, transportation, or teachers required. It’s been shown that preschool children who utilize PBS programs are better prepared for school by 30% in reading comprehension and math readiness skills.
- Vermont teachers, homeschoolers and students have free access to more than 100,000 curriculum-aligned digital resources through PBS Learning Media.
- Tens of thousands of older Vermonters, many of whom can’t afford to participate in, or can’t physically reach the arts by any other means, depend on Vermont PBS for information, education and entertainment.
- Vermont PBS programming and community outreach help to provide a venue for civic discourse. Our live call-in programs provide Vermonters with direct access to legislators and decision makers, supporting the values inherent in a civil, informed electorate.
- PBS continues to be rated as the most trusted institution among nationally known organizations. Vermonters turn to Vermont PBS for quality, unbiased news, information and entertainment that they can’t find anywhere else.

As Vermont’s visual storyteller, all of us at Vermont PBS will continue to amplify our community engagement activities and deepen our presence in and around the region in an effort to live into our mission to “connect neighbors through stories that change lives.”